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U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE DOCTRINE:
ENGINE OF CHANGE OR RELIC OF THE PAST?

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

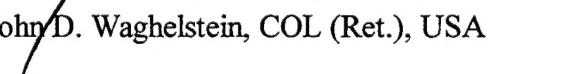
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Abstract of

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As a mission and as a concept, unconventional warfare (UW), is the heart and soul of the United States Army's Special Forces (SF). Since SF was created in 1952, UW operations have been the "touchstone" for all developments in the organization. Special Forces are the primary force within United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) for UW.

Doctrine for Joint Special Operations correctly defines a relevant UW mission for U.S. Special Operations Forces. But army Special Forces doctrine for UW operations focuses on only one aspect of UW - guerrilla warfare. This was appropriate in 1952 for the purpose of organizing partisans in Eastern Europe to oppose the Warsaw Pact. Today, however, guerrilla warfare is the least likely type of unconventional warfare operation to occur. Therefore, SF should now begin to focus on the indirect activities of unconventional warfare: subversion, sabotage and intelligence activities. Special Forces UW doctrine must also be updated to leverage new technological capabilities.

Special Forces UW doctrine must be revised in order to meet USSOCOM guidance to maintain and develop relevant capabilities. Unconventional warfare can be a valuable offensive tool for the joint force commander. However, in order to realize that potential, Special Forces UW doctrine must serve as the engine of change to maintain the practicality of UW techniques in the 21st Century.

Preface

I chose this topic in order to attempt a reconciliation of the following two statements:

"Unconventional warfare is not a viable mission for Special Forces. The only reason you train for [unconventional warfare], is because it is the best vehicle for maintaining your Special Forces skill set."

Peter J. Schoomaker, Commander in Chief, United States Special Operations Command during a conversation with the author at Camp Doha, Kuwait in February of 1998.

"Dissident elements are the key to UW mission potential in any region. As long as there are dissidents, there will be UW potential to support U.S. national interest."

Army Special Operations Forces Vision XXI, October 1997.

U.S. Army Special Forces were formed to conduct unconventional warfare. The current debate within the SF community focuses on two questions: Is UW still a relevant mission? And if UW is not relevant, should we still continue to train for it? I believe our National Military Strategy and the security environment in the 21st Century will require a robust military UW capability. General Schoomaker is only partly wrong when he asserts UW is not a viable mission for SF. Unconventional warfare continues to be practical, but the current doctrine preparing SF to conduct UW is outdated. This paper is an examination of how well SF doctrine for unconventional warfare has served the force, and more importantly, how that doctrine should change.

I. U.S. Army Special Forces: Unconventional Warfare as Core Purpose

On 19 June in 1952 the U.S. Army formed its first Special Forces unit, the 10th Special Forces Group. Unlike most combat units that are required to perform several missions, 10th SF Group was created for the sole purpose of conducting guerrilla warfare (GW).¹ Army doctrine described exactly what was expected of its newest unit:

“Guerrilla Warfare is defined in [Special Regulation] 320-5-1 as operations carried out by small independent forces, generally in the rear of the enemy, with the objective of harassing, delaying and disrupting military operations of the enemy. The term is sometimes limited to the military operations and tactics of small forces whose objective is to inflict casualties and damage upon the enemy rather than to seize or defend terrain; these operations are characterized by the extensive use of surprise and the emphasis on avoidance of casualties. The term . . . includes organized and directed passive resistance, espionage, assassination, sabotage and propaganda, and, in some cases, ordinary combat. Guerrilla warfare is normally carried on by irregular, or partisan forces; however, regular forces which have been cut off behind enemy lines or which have infiltrated into the enemy rear areas may use guerrilla tactics.”

FM 31-21, *Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare* (October, 1951)

Senior officers in the army did not embrace “unconventional warfare”* wholeheartedly; they recognized it as a viable tactic purely out of desperation. Two different trends forced U.S. military planners to consider employment of irregular forces.² First was the desperate military imbalance in Europe. Russia had the atomic bomb and fielded 100 divisions against a few small NATO armies. Yet the people of Eastern Europe openly resisted Soviet domination. Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians could conceivably be organized to fight Russian troops in their occupied homelands and thereby disperse Soviet power. The second trend was the war in Korea, which demonstrated the uselessness of nuclear weapons. At the same time, Communist guerrillas harassed the Eighth Army and demonstrated the effectiveness of irregular forces that U.S. generals preferred to forget.

* Guerrilla warfare and unconventional warfare have different meanings in current doctrine. The terms were often used interchangeably in the 1940s and 1950s.

Although the U.S. Army has a proud history of irregular warfare,^{*} it periodically purges those lessons from its institutional memory.³ Often in small-scale conflicts America had to counter an opponents use of UW/GW. But most large-scale conflicts have seen U.S. commanders scrambling to create an ad hoc organization with an offensive unconventional warfare capability (see APPENDIX A: Unconventional Warfare in American Military History). Forming a unit that specialized in unconventional warfare appeared to be an idea of some utility.

II. Evolution of Special Forces: Reactive Doctrine

The role of unconventional warfare doctrine is to prescribe the tasks that Special Forces units should execute in order to succeed at their mission of UW. Good UW doctrine is prescriptive; it describes the “how” of indirect combat without being so constrictive as to dictate procedures or stifle creativity. Simply stated, the crux of this discussion is: *Has the UW doctrine governing employment of army Special Forces caused units to conduct their indirect combat tasks better?*

Analysis of the evolution of army UW doctrine shows that founding SF with the sole mission of offensive unconventional warfare was problematic at best. Colonel Aaron Bank formed the 10th Special Forces Group (10th SFG) at Fort Bragg in 1952 and trained the unit using standards and lesson plans from his OSS days. An East German revolt against the Soviets in 1953 caused the 10th SFG to deploy to Germany. Colonel Bank found that the commanding general of United States Army-Europe had little, or no knowledge of the

* Irregular warfare is a broad term that includes the offensive use of irregular troops or a campaign by conventional forces against irregulars. Joint Pub 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms contains only the following definition: “irregular forces—Armed individuals or groups who are not members of the regular armed forces, police, or other internal security forces.”

capabilities of the 10th SFG. Even worse, the army had no plans to logically support the 50 guerrilla battalions that 10th SFG was to form in Soviet-occupied Europe.⁴ It was not until 1958 that army doctrine (FM 31-21, Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare) was rewritten to include the role of SF in unconventional warfare. The renamed FM 31-21, *Guerrilla Warfare and Special Forces* (1958), included logistics mechanisms to make UW a reality.

During the 1950's SF expanded to three groups with the mission of conducting UW in Eastern Europe, the USSR and the People's Republic of China. Unconventional warfare plans for these three areas depended on the ability of the Central Intelligence Agency to establish agents in the target countries. The agents would receive infiltrating SF teams and link them up with dissident elements.⁵

The National Security Act of 1947 had created the Central Intelligence Agency and tasked it with collecting strategic intelligence.⁶ The agency later assumed responsibility for covert paramilitary activities during peacetime. Military commanders are responsible for unconventional warfare in their assigned areas during wartime. However, the CIA is responsible for clandestine operations in peacetime and for the support networks that any UW effort requires.⁷ CIA responsibility for guerrilla warfare during peacetime became one of two dominant trends that shaped evolution of the doctrine governing SF employment.⁸

A second dominant trend shaping SF was the “search for utility.” World War II had confirmed the primacy of the “American way of war” which focused on a strategy of annihilation. War was viewed as an aberration; a combination of mass mobilization, technology and firepower was the solution to ending hostilities quickly. Unconventional warfare was slow, indirect and political in nature – the very antithesis of industrial-age

American pragmatism. Special Forces never had a constituency because few senior officers believed UW was a suitable tactic for the U.S. Army.⁹

By 1959 the link to the CIA and the search for utility would result in the first major combat employment of SF. CIA officers asked the army for assistance in combating communist guerrillas in Laos, and the army turned to Special Forces. Senior officers reasoned that if SF soldiers were experts in inciting guerrilla warfare, then they should be able to defeat guerrillas also. President John F. Kennedy subsequently embraced the idea of Special Forces as a low-visibility answer to communist-sponsored insurgencies. Despite the doctrinal focus of SF on UW, they were one of the best tools the army had for counter-insurgency, and that was what they began to be used for.¹⁰

Unconventional Warfare doctrine was updated to reflect the reality of what SF was doing: *Assist[ing] in training military personnel in combating guerrilla and terrorist activities and subversion. In addition, they may train foreign military personnel in the techniques of guerrilla warfare, thus enhancing the defense capability of the nation concerned. When so employed, special forces units supplement the military assistance groups and army missions.* FM 31-21, *Guerrilla Warfare and Special Forces Operations* (1961)

Combat operations in Vietnam caused SF to evolve even further from its roots. A CIA program in the early 1960s proved SF teams were effective at training and leading indigenous mountain tribes against communist aggressors. When the U.S. Army entered the Vietnam War, General Westmoreland succeeded in transferring the program to army control. General Westmoreland changed the focus from area defense to an offensive combat role. SF teams established camps along South Vietnam's border and began running patrols to interdict infiltrating communist units. Eventually SF teams were conducting reconnaissance and surveillance missions inside Vietnam and throughout Southeast Asia.¹¹

SF personnel under General Westmoreland's command and MACV-SOG^{*} both began to perform direct combat missions. Capturing enemy soldiers for interrogation, rescuing POWs and commando-type raids were added to the list of missions that SF was tasked with as the war progressed.¹² Sometimes these reconnaissance and "direct action" missions included indigenous forces, other times they were conducted unilaterally. By the war's end U.S. Army Special Forces evolved from guerrilla trainers to guerrilla fighters and commandos.

Special Forces doctrine was updated in 1969 while maintaining UW as the primary SF mission. The definition of UW was also updated:

"Unconventional warfare consists of military, political, psychological, or economic actions of a covert, clandestine, or overt nature within areas under the actual or potential control or influence of a force or state whose interests and objectives are inimical to those of the United States. These actions are conducted unilaterally by United States resources, or in conjunction with indigenous assets, and avoid formal military confrontation."
FM 31-21, *Special Forces Operations* (February, 1969)

The 1969 doctrine added training, advising and assisting a threatened friendly government (Foreign Internal Defense). The doctrine also added deep penetrations to gather strategic intelligence (Strategic Reconnaissance) and attack critical targets (Direct Action).¹³

After the Vietnam War, SF was reduced in strength from seven groups to three and the search for utility began anew. Special Forces tried to fit in to the army's plan to fight Soviet tank armies in Europe. Strategic reconnaissance (SR) and direct action (DA) were emphasized as primary SF missions in order to convince senior leaders to retain SF units. Foreign internal defense (FID) also received emphasis due to SF's growing role in counter-insurgency. In the 1980s counter-terrorism (CT) was added to the list of SF missions and specially trained SF units focused on nothing but this type of direct mission.¹⁴

* Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG) was a joint service, JCS-directed unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. General Westmoreland exercised OPCON of only those SF units operating within South Vietnam.

Special Forces units finally executed UW missions when they supported insurgencies during the 1980s and 1990s. Individual soldiers and entire SF units were employed to train guerrillas as part of an active American effort to challenge communist countries and Iraq. *Contra* rebels (FDN)^{*} in Central America, *mujahadeen* in Afghanistan, and Kurds were among the dissident elements that received training, advice and support from Special Forces soldiers.¹⁵

Contra rebels' success in forcing elections and a change of government in Nicaragua is an excellent illustration of the indirect application of force. The same is true of the monumental defeat of the U.S.S.R. in Afghanistan at the hands of United States-supported *mujahadeen*.¹⁶ Supporting these insurgencies required many of the skills unique to U.S. Army Special Forces. But the missions were not conducted as envisioned in Special Forces UW doctrine. None of these operations was similar to the WW II guerrilla warfare scenario. Accordingly, none of these operations required SF teams to infiltrate denied territory and establish an urban underground and a support auxiliary as prescribed in Special Forces UW doctrine.

The UW doctrine written by the founders of Special Forces originally served a unique and vital purpose. FM 31-21 prescribed UW training that served as magnificent preparation for soldiers who were tasked with a wide variety of indirect and direct missions. As Special Forces has evolved, many observers have noted that structuring the force for a UW mission resulted in a superbly flexible unit that was uniquely capable of operating across the full spectrum of conflict.¹⁷ But SF was formed and organized primarily for unconventional warfare. An analysis of history shows that *Special Forces has never executed the UW mission as SF doctrine envisions*. Clearly then, it is time to change the doctrine to match the reality.

* *Fuerza Democratica Nicaraguense*

III. Unconventional Warfare Doctrine for the 21st Century

Title 10, Section 167 and 164 of United States Code list eight “activities” equivalent to statutory missions and roles for U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM): Unconventional warfare (UW); direct action (DA); special reconnaissance (SR); foreign internal defense (FID); combating terrorism (CBT); psychological operations (PSYOPS); civil affairs (CA); counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (CP); and “such other activities as may be specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.” Pursuant to CJCSI 3210.01, “Joint Information Warfare Policy,” and Commander in Chief, United States Special Operations Command (USCINCSOC) directive, information operations (IO) has been designated as the ninth principal SO mission for Special Operations Forces (SOF). SOF are organized, trained, and equipped specifically to accomplish the nine principal missions.¹⁸

United States National Military Strategy concisely states the need for an unconventional warfare capability in the 21st Century:

“The range of challenges to our security demands an ability to influence certain events with forces that are smaller and less visible than conventional formations, offering the NCA options that do not entail a major military commitment. Special Operations Forces provide this capability and offer unique skills, tactics and systems for the execution of unconventional, potentially high-payoff missions.”

National Military Strategy of the United States of America (1997)

In turn, joint Special Operations doctrine correctly defines a relevant UW mission for U.S. Special Operations Forces:

“Unconventional Warfare: A broad spectrum of military and para-military operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes guerrilla warfare and other direct offensive low-visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and evasion and escape (E & E).”

Joint Pub 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (April 1988)

U.S. Army Special Forces are the primary units in USSOCOM organized and trained to conduct UW (see APPENDIX B: USSOCOM Missions and Forces).¹⁹ As such, SF doctrine for UW should be well developed.

Current Special Forces doctrine for UW operations focuses only on guerrilla warfare. This was appropriate when SF was founded in 1952 for the purpose of organizing partisans in Eastern Europe. But GW is only one element of unconventional warfare.²⁰ Special Forces UW doctrine fails to address the other components of unconventional warfare (see APPENDIX C: U.S. Army Special Forces Doctrinal Hierarchy). The army Special Forces UW Mission Training Plan lists a total of 56 tasks. *All* of the 15 UW-specific tasks focus on *guerrilla warfare*.²¹

It is likely that the United States will need to employ unconventional warfare against a regional or peer competitor in a future conflict. As part of the UW campaign, SF units may be tasked to conduct guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare consists of military and paramilitary operations conducted by irregular, predominately indigenous forces in enemy-held or hostile territory. It is the overt military aspect of an insurgency or other armed resistance movement. Thus, guerrilla warfare could be used as an economy of force measure against a foe that has occupied territory America desires to liberate. Guerrillas could be employed in either of the most likely Major Theater Wars. The previous wars in Kuwait and Korea both resulted in guerrilla warfare efforts in enemy-occupied territory. But history shows that guerrilla warfare is becoming the *least important* component of UW.

The trend away from GW and toward indirect activities began during the Korean War, one of two MTWs most likely to occur next. During the Korean War a bewildering array of U.S. organizations undertook unconventional warfare efforts. The common requirement of

all these units was a need for intelligence that could not be provided by electronic means or overhead imagery. Most of the UW organizations focused on gathering intelligence at the tactical and operational level. Only a few of the American units conducted guerrilla warfare in addition to their intelligence activities.²²

The activities of the Kuwaiti resistance during the Gulf War may further illustrate the declining utility of guerrilla warfare within a UW campaign.* Unconventional warfare is by nature the indirect application of force. Kuwaiti resistance fighters very quickly learned that it was better to focus their effort on the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage and intelligence activities.²³ In other words, a resistance movement has alternative methods to combat the occupying force. Kuwaiti resistance members often decided it was better to conduct sabotage or gather intelligence on Iraqi targets and pass this information to coalition forces for subsequent attack. The alternative was to risk a guerrilla unit in a direct attack on the target.²⁴ In the final analysis, the best guerrillas are “live” guerrillas. Global communications and precision long-range fires will most likely reinforce the trend away from guerrilla combat and toward indirect activities.

A more likely use of unconventional warfare in the 21st Century will be support to insurgencies. Insurgencies are fundamentally different from guerrilla warfare campaigns conducted in support of conventional wars. In a larger war, guerrilla warfare is a supporting effort in a conventional campaign with the objective of expelling an occupying force. An insurgency is not part of a larger war; it is *the* war. Insurgents are attempting to overthrow an established government or change the political balance of power. Military objectives are

* The Gulf War *may* illustrate a further decline in the utility of guerrilla warfare. But Kuwait is a small kingdom with only one urban center, so it is difficult to extrapolate an undeniable trend away from guerrilla combat.

ascendant in guerrilla warfare. In direct contrast, political objectives are the primary concern in an insurgency.²⁵ The National Military Strategy requires that US SOF maintain the ability to manipulate certain events with forces that are less visible. Support to insurgency is one method to accomplish that.

As stated in Army Special Operations Forces Vision XXI:

"When UW is conducted independently of conventional military operations, it is focused primarily on political and psychological objectives. Countries that export military force cannot do so without first consolidating their power base within their own borders. By creating an internal back-fire to cause unrest and political instability, UW reduces the effectiveness of the rogue nations to export their military and political aims."

No part of army Special Forces UW doctrine addresses how to support insurgencies.²⁶ Both joint and U.S. Army doctrine includes support to insurgencies as an army mission.²⁷ Clearly, Special Forces must update UW doctrine to include support to insurgencies.

It is even more likely that SF will become increasingly involved with three of the indirect activities described in the joint doctrine definition of unconventional warfare: subversion, sabotage and intelligence activities.*

Intelligence activities conducted by Special Forces soldiers in a UW environment could provide valuable information unobtainable by other methods. Overhead platforms and high-tech systems have several limitations. Only Human Intelligence (HUMINT) can provide information on the opponent's morale, will and intent. An excellent illustration of this point was when Special Forces units began working with Somali clans several months prior to Operation RESTORE HOPE.²⁸ The SF teams provided valuable intelligence to the Marine Expeditionary Unit prior to the amphibious landing that initiated American relief operations. The type of intelligence needed in that operation could not be provided by technical means.

* Evasion and Escape is the fourth indirect activity listed in the joint doctrine definition of unconventional warfare. E & E will not be discussed in this paper due to the sensitivity and classification of the subject.

SF teams could ascertain the intent of different clans and warlords only by establishing rapport and living with the people.

Special Forces units function as “global scouts”* that can gather valuable intelligence in the critical early stages of a crisis. Each geographic CINC uses SF units as one of the mainstays in his theater engagement strategy. When critical situations develop, Special Forces teams are often on-site, or in an adjacent country performing training, counter-drug or other missions.²⁹ Special Forces UW doctrine must be updated to address how units will collect intelligence for the joint force commander in a MOOTW environment.[†]

After SF teams assist in identifying the influence hierarchy of a target population, subversion and sabotage can be employed to leverage critical vulnerabilities. Subversion is defined as: “Action designed to undermine the military, economic, psychological, or political strength or morale of a regime.”³⁰ In the 21st Century, SF teams may train and arm dissidents in order to challenge the political strength of a rogue nation. In an environment of failed states and warrior societies the leverage may be different. SF soldiers might destroy the only airfield capable of receiving fresh daily shipments of a universally used commodity in order to influence a target population.[‡]

Sabotage has proven to be an extremely cost effective method to wage war.³¹ Sabotage is defined as: “An act or acts with intent to injure, interfere with, or obstruct the national defense of a country by willfully injuring or destroying, or attempting to injure or destroy any national defense or war materiel, premises or utilities, to include human and natural

* The current Commander in Chief of USSOCOM, General Peter J. Schoomaker, coined the term global scouts to symbolize the fact that special operations forces are often operating in an area prior to a crisis occurring.

† The author specifically cites a MOOTW environment because the principal USSOCOM mission of Special Reconnaissance addresses reconnaissance support to the joint force commander in a developed theater or war.

‡ Khat is a narcotic substance that is harvested and transported while still fresh. Somali clans are highly dependent on fresh supplies. For this reason, airfields were identified as an influence target during the author’s duty in Somalia.

resources.”³² In the 21st Century, nodal analysis will further improve the efficiency of sabotage as a means of war. By targeting specific segments of a regime, SF teams and their surrogates could focus the effects of U.S. military action. Cruise missile attacks are an application of force that typically arouses an entire nation. Instead, SF teams may train surrogates to inject computer viruses into the key business enterprises supporting a ruling clique.

Joint doctrine for Information Operations recognizes the close relationship between IO and SOF.³³ Information operations are an indirect application of force, much like UW. A robust unconventional warfare capability is the key to using dissident or surrogate forces to weight American IO capabilities.

U.S. Army Special Forces UW doctrine currently does not address how SF teams are to support Information Operations. Nor does it address how to execute intelligence activities, subversion and sabotage.

IV. Counter-arguments

Some influential writers within the Special Operations community argue against the proposals posited in this article. The principal argument is that guerrilla warfare has not proven viable since the WW II/ Korean War timeframe. If America was unwilling to conduct guerrilla operations at the height of the Cold War, how can one foresee employing GW in the future?³⁴

Before abandoning guerrilla warfare this writer believes it would be wise to reexamine history and postulate the 21st Century security environment. In WW II, the OSS conducted guerrilla warfare in Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia and Japanese-occupied Burma. Allied

conventional forces were never committed to these areas. American and British guerrilla warfare units were a powerful symbol of Allied solidarity with the population of occupied countries in the absence of an overt effort.³⁵ America will likely contend with an increasing number of “cultural fault-line wars” and failed states in the 21st Century. It is conceivable the United States may commit Special Forces in a GW role to “hold the line” in one area while devoting the bulk of its military resources to other conflicts. If the Kuwaiti resistance did not have long-range fires available it is likely they would have shifted towards direct guerrilla combat.³⁶ In the final analysis guerrilla warfare is an economy of force tactic.

The dominant trend for commanders in the 21st Century will be fewer forces to conduct more missions against an increasing number of foes. Guerrilla warfare is the *least likely* method of UW, but it is not nonviable.

An argument related to the one discussed above contends that the United States is unlikely to support insurgencies, because American foreign policy is essentially concerned with the maintenance of order. The United States established or adopted the world status quo in law, finance, commerce, communications, etc. We are the primary beneficiaries of stability. Therefore America is unlikely to support insurgencies that destabilize the political equilibrium. Furthermore, American government and public support is transient in nature. How likely is it that the insurgents would trust the United States to persevere? How likely would success be?

This writer considers that insurgencies can serve as leverage against rogue nations as stated in ARSOF VISION XXI. An insurgency can also be used to *stabilize* an area. The best example of this is American support to the *Contras* in Nicaragua. Nicaragua was actively engaged, with Cuban and Soviet support, in attempts to destabilize countries in

Central America. But Nicaragua was unable to devote all of its resources to “exporting revolution” because the *Contras* were a serious challenge to the Sandinista power base.³⁷ Eventually the *Contras* were able to force free elections and the Sandinistas were deposed. Central America subsequently became a more stable and democratic region.

The transient nature of American support makes support to insurgencies problematic, but not impossible. “Covert” support to the *Contras* was openly debated in the U.S. Congress. At times the support was cut off. But in the end, the overall tendency to counter Sandinista aggression with *Contra* leverage paid tremendous dividends.³⁸ Lastly, it is largely irrelevant whether insurgents will trust in long-term support from America. Joint and army UW doctrine states that the United States does not *create* resistance movements. American UW doctrine is built on the precept that we support already existing dissidents. History has shown that most resistance movements are not selective in accepting aid.³⁹ The United States should be prepared to support an insurgency if we want a voice in the post-conflict phase when the insurgency prevails.

A final counter-argument to the thesis of this paper is that any unconventional warfare efforts should be left to other government agencies. Special Forces units do not have the resources to conduct large-scale covert operations for extended periods of time. Instead of revising UW doctrine, SF should leave the mission to other organizations. Special Forces can continue to use guerrilla warfare as a training vehicle to prepare units for a wide variety of missions, such as FID. Thus, SF units can also continue to support the activities of lead agencies within the government. In other words, stop duplicating the function of civilian agencies.

The response to the duplication argument is that four of the five U.S. Army Special Operations units duplicate or complement the functions of civilian agencies.⁴⁰ These units remain useful to the government in their *military form* because they are complementary to government efforts and operational commanders need these capabilities in “uniform.” Unconventional warfare is a proven, cost-effective tool that should remain in the combatant commanders toolbox when dealing with the diverse challenges of the 21st Century.

Special Forces UW doctrine should be updated even if one can only envision conducting UW in support of a lead agency. There is no question that Special Forces groups do *not* have the resources to conduct sizeable covert UW operations. Furthermore, the political viability of these actions varies with each change of administration in the federal government. Nevertheless, history indicates that U.S. agencies will again require UW support from Special Forces personnel. Whether supporting a commander in a regional war, or a lead agency in a limited covert action, SF personnel ought to be trained in the most effective UW techniques possible.

V. Recommended Revisions to Special Forces Unconventional Warfare Doctrine

Special Forces unconventional warfare doctrine must serve as the engine of change to prepare the force for a continuing relevant role in the future. U.S. Special Operations Command has charged U.S. special operations forces to be the most capable and relevant SOF in existence. General Schoomaker (CINCSOC) demands that USSOCOM maintain a broad array of capabilities that provide the NCA with value-added relevant in time, space and circumstance. He maintains that SOF must evolve by determining which capabilities to retain, which to develop, and which to shift to conventional forces.⁴¹ Unconventional

warfare has always been a relevant form of combat, from biblical times to the war in Afghanistan. But current Special Forces UW doctrine is not optimally relevant for the 21st Century.

In 1985 Charles Moser made some prescient observations when he published the book *Combat on Communist Territory*. Moser chronicled the fight of anti-communist guerrillas from Nicaragua to Angola. He wrote several years before the success of United States-sponsored insurgents in Afghanistan and Nicaragua, and the defeat of communism. Moser noted a remarkable lack of theory on American or democratically supported resistance movements. A detailed search of the Library of Congress revealed numerous academic works on the theory and practice of communist sponsored insurgency against the free world. There were *no* scholarly works on the theory of democratic support to an insurgency.⁴² This author was similarly unable to find any works describing such theory despite considerable research. U.S. Army Special Forces are the primary unit within USSOCOM for the conduct of UW missions. It is therefore incumbent on SF to promulgate the UW theory that has yet to be articulated.

U.S. Army Special Forces Command must revise UW doctrine in the following manner: *Intelligence activities in a UW environment should be the first area addressed.* SF teams are regionally oriented, language capable, global scouts. Special Forces units are in a unique position to support the joint force commander if doctrine and training prepare them for the task. Special Forces UW doctrine must be updated to address how units will collect intelligence, with an emphasis on HUMINT collection in a MOOTW environment.

The second subject added to UW doctrine should be employment of subversion and sabotage. Subversion and sabotage should focus on employment of surrogates, thus

maximizing the indirect nature of UW while reducing the risk to U.S. forces. The new doctrine should also recognize the fact that physical access is not always required to conduct these activities. Unconventional warfare can become a significant part of Information Operations and Command and Control Warfare if doctrine and training prepares units for the task. Joint doctrine has already recognized the potential.

The third topic in revised UW doctrine should be support to insurgencies. Special Forces units have already conducted such operations successfully. The lessons that were learned have yet to be incorporated into UW doctrine.

Complete the revision of UW doctrine by updating the portion concerning guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare is the least likely method of UW, but it does have continued relevance. Our revised doctrine should be flexible enough to realize that even if GW has little or no relevance in one geographic area, it may well have continued relevance in other areas. The guerrilla warfare doctrine of the future must move beyond the WW II partisan methods developed by the founders of SF. Special Forces are unlikely to lead rural guerrilla units using only modifications of light infantry tactics. Revised GW doctrine must address urbanization, technological developments and information operations at a minimum.

VI. Conclusion

Revising doctrine is only the beginning of the process. The U.S. Army uses an effective paradigm for transforming doctrine into actual capabilities. Doctrine, training, leader development, organization, materiel and soldier skills, or DTLOMS, is the organizational model for transforming any force within the army. All of the aforementioned areas must also be updated to support a rejuvenated concept of UW. But doctrine is the starting point.

Doctrine must serve as the “engine of change” to meet CINCSOC’s guidance to maintain relevant capabilities. The fact that SF teams have proven capable of other missions should not detract from their original purpose of executing UW. Special Forces units have often proven the usefulness of a “defensive” irregular warfare capability in their FID role. Unconventional warfare is inherently offensive and can be a valuable tool for the joint force commander. To deny him that leverage will surrender some initiative to the numerous and varied foes America will face in the next century.

APPENDIX A

Unconventional Warfare in American Military History

Americans mastered offensive unconventional warfare during the French and Indian War, and they subsequently won their independence from England with a combination of partisan units, regulars and militia. The Seminole Wars were an early lesson in counter-insurgency operations, the defensive form of irregular warfare. The Mexican War and the Civil War saw employment of both conventional and guerrilla forces. The Indian campaigns were largely irregular warfare.

But U.S. military knowledge in the early 20th century was shaped by the conventional battles of World War I and counter-guerrilla operations. American experience in WW I highlighted the importance of mass mobilization and technology in industrial-age warfare. After the war, U.S. forces focused on counter-insurgency campaigns. Soldiers and Marines gained extensive experience in fighting irregulars by crushing the Philippine guerrillas and combating numerous uprisings in the Caribbean and Central America.⁴³ As America prepared to enter World War II, an offensive guerrilla warfare capability was the furthest thing from most military minds.

War and desperation caused America to develop an irregular warfare unit once again. Winston Churchill surveyed Nazi-occupied Europe and the hopeless state of Allied morale in 1940. He formed the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and tasked it with a mission to “Set Europe ablaze!”⁴⁴ In 1941 President Franklin D. Roosevelt followed suit. Against the advice of his service chiefs, FDR directed formation of a U.S. government organization to collect strategic intelligence. Colonel William J. Donovan led the fledgling office of Coordinator of Information (COI) and he wanted to expand its operations along the British model. By the summer of 1942 the renamed Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had extended its charter to encompass “special operations,” a term that eventually became synonymous with unconventional warfare. Donovan’s organization continued to collect intelligence, and undertook sabotage, subversion, propaganda and guerrilla warfare.⁴⁵

The OSS fielded a variety of special operations units while conducting effective irregular campaigns. Three man “Jedburgh Teams” linked up with French partisans and organized a guerrilla campaign against Nazi lines of communication.* Operational Groups (OGs) consisted of 15 men trained in light or heavy weapons, engineering, medicine or communications. OGs could organize partisans and also conduct direct sabotage, rescue downed pilots and collect intelligence. While Jedburghs were only employed in France, OGs were deployed to France, Norway, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia.⁴⁶

In the Pacific theater, OSS Detachment 101 conducted missions similar to the OGs in Europe. General MacArthur would not allow the OSS to operate in his Southwest Pacific Command. But a few U.S. Army officers remained in the Philippines when MacArthur left, and they led tens of thousands of partisans against the Japanese.⁴⁷ By the war’s end, American soldiers had successfully conducted offensive unconventional warfare against their foes throughout both theaters.

* Jedburgh teams were named after the Scottish town where combined training was conducted by the OSS and SOE.

General Eisenhower's evaluation of partisan operations seemed to confirm the importance of unconventional warfare: "*I consider the disruption of enemy rear communications, the harassing of German road moves and increasing strain placed on the German . . . internal security services throughout occupied Europe by the organized forces of resistance, played a very considerable part in our complete and final victory.*"⁴⁸

But most high-ranking officers considered the UW effort a waste of men and material, or a sideshow at best. President Truman ordered the OSS disbanded on 20 September, 1945.⁴⁹

The Korean War was largely fought in the manner of WW I and WW II; firepower and technology were seen as the key to defeating communist hordes. Nevertheless, military commanders decided they needed an offensive guerrilla warfare capability once again.⁵⁰ Several organizations conducted partisan operations, but they were improvised efforts of varied effectiveness.⁵¹ Unconventional warfare was again seen as a sideshow and special operations units were disbanded even before the war ended. A few UW advocates within the army succeeded in founding U.S. Army Special Forces only because 3,000 excess personnel slots were available from the recently disbanded Airborne Ranger Companies.⁵²

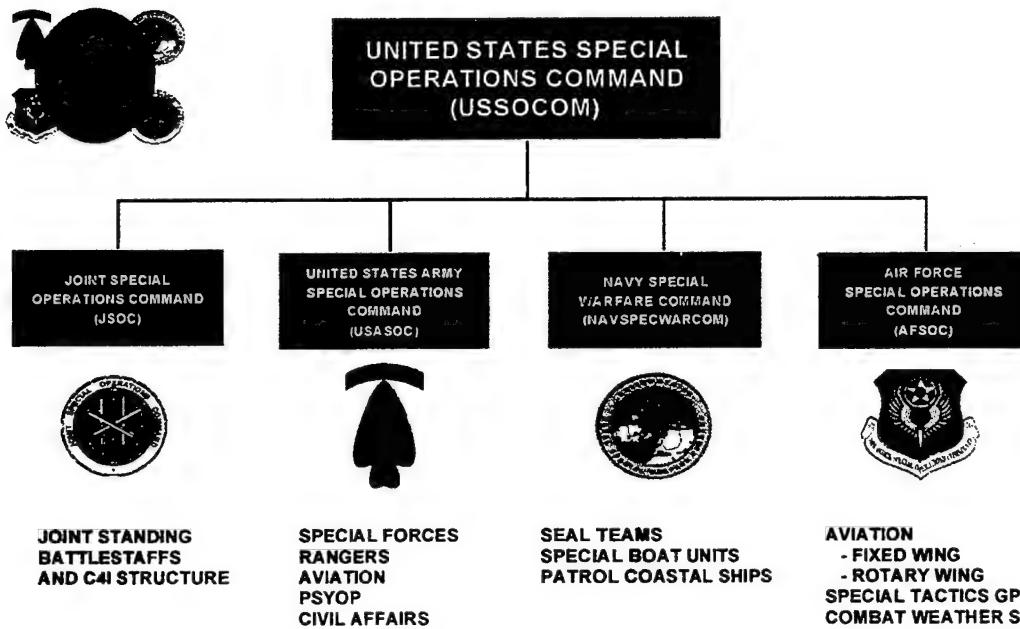
The brief introduction above demonstrates that the U.S. military had to conduct irregular warfare more often than not. It was the recurring requirement for an offensive UW capability and the success of the OSS in WW II that led to the creation of U.S. Army Special Forces.

APPENDIX B

USSOCOM Missions and Forces

U.S. Army Special Forces are one of five types of units within U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC). USASOC is one of four components in USSOCOM.

Figure 1
U.S. Special Operations Forces



Joint doctrine for special operations designates nine principal missions and seven collateral activities for U.S. Special Operations Forces:

SOF are organized, trained, and equipped specifically to accomplish nine principal missions: direct action (DA), special reconnaissance (SR), foreign internal defense (FID), unconventional warfare (UW), combating terrorism (CBT), psychological operations (PSYOP), civil affairs (CA), counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (CP), and information operations (IO). SOF's principal missions are enduring and will change infrequently; however, SOF's collateral activities will shift more readily because of the changing international environment.

Joint Pub 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, 17 April 1998

SOF frequently conduct the following seven collateral activities: coalition support, combat search and rescue, counterdrug activities, countermine activities, foreign humanitarian assistance, security assistance, and special activities. SOF are not manned, trained, and equipped for collateral activities. SOF conduct collateral activities using the inherent capabilities resident in their primary missions. SOF may be tasked by the National Command Authorities (NCA), joint force commanders, US ambassadors, or other government agencies to perform missions for which it is the best-suited among available forces, or perhaps the only force available.

Joint Pub 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, 17 April 1998

Joint doctrine further designates which forces are best used for each of the primary missions:

Generic capabilities required for UW include an understanding of UW theory and insurgent tactics, language proficiency, area and cultural orientation, tactical skills (through brigade level), advanced medical skills, rudimentary construction and engineering skills, familiarity with a wide variety of demolitions and weapons, and knowledge of clandestine communications, intelligence systems, civil-military operations, and PSYOP. SOF units possess differing combinations of these capabilities. When tailoring forces for UW, the JFSOCC matches unit capabilities to mission-specific requirements, often resulting in a joint tactical element.

(1) ARSOF. *UW is principally the responsibility of Army special forces (SF). SF operational detachments possess all required UW skills in a single tactical unit. CA FID/UW battalions and PSYOP units frequently augment SF for UW operations. ARSOA units perform special air operations in support of SOF conducting UW operations. Rangers are not trained for UW.*

(2) NAVSOF. *Navy SEALs are the primary NAVSOF trained and equipped to conduct UW in littoral and riverine environments. . . . Depending upon theater requirements, NSWGs may tailor forces to conduct UW, or NAVSOF may be integrated into a joint package as the maritime extension of a predominantly land-oriented UW mission.*

(3) AFSOF. *AFSOF aircraft support UW by conducting special air operations to provide covert, clandestine, or low-visibility infiltration, exfiltration, resupply, surveillance, and fire support for other SOF elements. AFSOF may also conduct UW by training, advising, and assisting the air forces of an insurgent or resistance organization or a third-country sponsor to conduct special air operations similar to those conducted by US AFSOF. AFSOF special tactics teams possess skills that are frequently required within a joint UW package. AFSOF airborne PSYOP dissemination assets may be employed as force multipliers for military actions, electronic combat measures, or support of tactical cover and deception activities.*

Joint Pub 3-05.3, *Joint Special Operations Operational Procedure*, 25 August 1993

The following table depicts language and area orientation for U.S. SOF along with their primary missions:

Figure 2
SOF Units and Missions

Force	Area-orientation	Language	Primary Missions
ARMY			
Special Forces	Yes	All operators	UW, FID, DA, SR, CBT, CP, IO
Rangers	Worldwide	None	DA, CBT, CP
SO Aviation	No	None	DA, SR, Support all missions
CA	Yes	AC-Yes / RC*	CA, FID, Support UW
PSYOP	Yes	AC / RC†	PSYOP, Support FID & UW
NAVY			
SEALs	Some‡	Some§	DA, SR, CBT, FID, CP, UW**
Special Boat Units	Some	None	Support all missions
Patrol Coastal	Some	None	Support all missions
AIR FORCE			
ST Grp	Some	None	Support all missions
FID Squadron	Yes	Some	FID, UW, Support all missions
Fixed/Rotary AV	Worldwide	None	SR, DA, Spt UW, Spt all missions
Weather SQ	Yes	None	Support all missions
SMU††			
	Worldwide	Some	CBT, CP, IO, DA, SR, Limited FID and UW

* Some members of the Reserve Component CA units receive language training. All operators in the Active Component 96th CA Battalion are language qualified.

† Most AC and some RC PSYOP personnel are language qualified.

‡ SEAL teams are aligned with the geographic AORs for the purpose of wartime missions and exercises. SEAL platoons afloat with deployed ARGs respond to any contingency the ARG does. Thus SEAL platoons sometimes respond to a crisis in AORs where they have no regional orientation. USSOCOM is currently trying to keep SEAL platoons ashore and deploy them to support ARGs within their aligned AORs as a crisis occurs.

§ Selected SEALs receive language training later in their careers. Unlike Special Forces, it is not a requirement.

** SEAL doctrine envisions UW as short duration raids and ambushes, not as a long-term mission in denied or sensitive territory.

†† Special Mission Units

APPENDIX C

U.S. Army Special Forces Doctrinal Hierarchy

The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (JFKSWCS) serves as the army proponent of doctrine for army Special Forces. U.S. Army doctrine for Special Operations Forces falls into three broad categories: Keystone manuals; mission training manuals and specialized techniques manuals.

Keystone manuals describe a unit(s) roles, missions, capabilities, organization, command and control, employment and sustainment operations across the operational continuum:

FM 31-20: DOCTRINE FOR SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONS, 20 APRIL 1990:
Is the keystone manual for U.S. Army Special Forces. Thus, FM 31-20 is a continuation of the doctrine established in the Joint Pub 3-05 series (Doctrine for Joint Special Operations).

Mission training manuals describe what tasks are necessary to accomplish a given type of mission and offer suggestions on how to train for these tasks:

FM 31-20-3: FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES FOR SPECIAL FORCES, 20 SEPTEMBER 1994, and

FM 31-20-5: SPECIAL RECONNAISSANCE TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES FOR SPECIAL FORCES, 23 MARCH 1993:

Are current field manuals for FID and SR mission training.

ARTEP 31-807—30-MTP: MISSION TRAINING PLAN FOR THE SPECIAL FORCES COMPANY: UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE, 28 SEPTEMBER 1988, is an old publication that is to be replaced by an updated field manual.

Special Forces UW doctrine has not been updated in several years. Therefore, SF soldiers often rely on doctrinal publications that are no longer in print. Old manuals such as Field Circular 31-3, *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare Planning* (January, 1984) are highly prized possessions in SF team rooms because there is nothing else available. All of these old UW manuals focus exclusively on WW II unconventional warfare scenarios and techniques.

Specialized techniques manuals provide training guidance and standards for individual soldier skills that are required to execute Special Forces missions. Some examples are:

FM 31-19: MILITARY FREE-FALL PARACHUTING TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES, 01 OCTOBER 1999.

FM 31-27: PACK ANIMAL OPERATIONS, 05 MAY 1998.

FM 31-28: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE, 05 MAY 1997.

FM 31-26: (S) SPECIAL FORCES ADVANCED OPERATION TECHNIQUES (U), 30 SEPTEMBER 1993.

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¹ Aaron Bank, From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces (New York: Simon & Schuster 1987), 167-176.

² Charles M. Simpson III, Inside the Green Berets: The First Thirty Years, A History of the U.S. Army Special Forces (New York: Berkley Books 1983), 16.

³ John D. Waghelstein, "Preparing the US Army for the Wrong War, Educational and Doctrinal Failure 1865-91," Small Wars and Insurgencies, Winter 1999, 26-29.

⁴ Bank, 214.

⁵ Joseph R. Fischer, "Cut from a Different Cloth: The Origins of U.S. Army Special Forces," Special Warfare, April 1995, 37-38.

⁶ Richard Harris Smith, OSS: The Secret History of America's first Central Intelligence Agency (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1972), 365.

⁷ Thomas K. Adams, US Special Operations Forces in Action (London: Frank Cass 1998), 44-45.

⁸ Susan L. Marquis, Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press 1997), 17-19.

⁹ Ibid., 6-8.

¹⁰ Shelby L. Stanton, Green Berets at War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956-1975 (Novato, CA: Presidio Press 1985), 9-43.

¹¹ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., The Army and Vietnam (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press 1986), 69-75.

¹² John L. Plaster, SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam (New York: Simon & Schuster 1997), 31-35.

¹³ Kenneth E. Tovo, "Special Forces Mission Focus for the Future," Special Warfare, December 1996, 3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gary M. Jones and Christopher Tone, "Unconventional Warfare: Core Purpose of Special Forces," Special Warfare, Summer 1999, 9.

¹⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other than War (Joint Pub 3-07) (Washington, D.C.: 16 June, 1995), III-15.

¹⁷ Larry Cable, "Straddling the Cultural Gaps: Special Forces in the Indirect Action Environment," Special Warfare, January 1996, 11.

¹⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Special Operations (Joint Pub3-05) (Washington, D.C.: 17 April, 1998), II-2 – II-3.

¹⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Special Operations Operational Procedures (Joint Pub3-05.3) (Washington, D.C.: 25 August, 1993), II-1 – II-2.

²⁰ Doctrine for Joint Special Operations (Joint Pub3-05), II-7.

²¹ Department of the Army, ARTEP 31-807—30-MTP: Mission Training Plan for the Special Forces Company: Unconventional Warfare (Washington, D.C.: 28 September, 1998), 5-2 - 5-4.

²² Ed Evanhoe, Dark Moon: Eighth Army Special Operations in the Korean War (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press 1995), 9-16.

²³ John M. Levins, "The Kuwaiti Resistance," Middle East Quarterly, March 1995, 30-31.

²⁴ John J. Fialka, "Kuwaitis Wait in Saudi Arabia Housing Project Recalling Iraqi Horrors and a Broken Resistance," Wall Street Journal, 5 November 1990, 1:1-2.

²⁵ Headquarters Departments of the Army and the Air Force, FM 100-20/AFP 3-20: Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict (Washington, D.C.: 5 December, 1990), 2-0 – 2-1.

²⁶ Jones and Tone, 7.

²⁷ Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other than War (Joint Pub3-07), III-15 and U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. "Key Doctrinal Concepts and Emerging Doctrine." ST 100-3 Battle Book. July 1999. <http://www.ST 100-3/C1/1Chp.htm/> (18 January 2000).

²⁸ United States Special Operations Command, History (Tampa, FL: September, 1998), 43. Also based on authors informal conversations with several members of 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) while the author was assigned to that unit from 1993-1999.

²⁹ Ibid., 62-63.

³⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (Joint Pub 1-02) (Washington, D.C.: As Amended Through 15 April, 1998), 419.

³¹ Capt. Howard L. Douthit, "The Use and Effectiveness of Sabotage as a Means of Unconventional Warfare – An Historical Perspective from World War I through Viet Nam," (Unpublished Research Paper, Department of the Air Force Air University, Wright – Patterson Air Force Base, OH: 1987), 108-110.

³² Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (Joint Pub 1-02), 379.

³³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Information Operations (Joint Pub3-13) (Washington, D.C.: 9 October, 1998), viii.

³⁴ Jones and Tone, 9.

³⁵ Smith, 311-312.

³⁶ Levin, 32.

³⁷ Charles Moser,ed., Combat on Communist Territory (Lake Bluff, IL: Regnery Gateway, Inc., 1985), 30.

³⁸ John Prados, Presidents' Secret Wars: The CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II through the Persian Gulf (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks 1996), 486.

³⁹ Steven Metz, The Future of Insurgency (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute 1993), 25.

⁴⁰ John T. Fishel, "Little Wars, Small Wars, LIC, OOTW, The Gap, and Things That Go Bump in the Night," Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement, Winter 1995, 380. Only the Ranger Regiment has no civilian counterpart. For example, Psychological Operations units complement several government organizations ranging from the U.S. Information Agency to the Voice of America. Civil Affairs units complement the work of agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development.

⁴¹ Jones and Tone, 8.

⁴² Moser, 190-192.

⁴³ United States Marine Corps, Small Wars Manual 1940 (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press 1972), vi.

⁴⁴ Smith, 28.

⁴⁵ Fischer, 29-30.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 30-32.

⁴⁷ Russell W. Volkmann, We Remained: Three Years Behind Enemy Lines in the Philippines (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1954), 40-41.

⁴⁸ Fischer, 32.

⁴⁹ Smith, 361-366.

⁵⁰ Evanhoe, 12-16.

⁵¹ Simpson, 17.

⁵² Bank, 171-174.

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